

Transforming Pain Awakening Pleasure

Whatever you do, don't shut off your pain; accept your pain and remain vulnerable. However desperate you become, accept your pain as it is, because it is in fact trying to hand you a priceless gift: the chance of discovering, through spiritual practice, what lies behind sorrow. (Osho - The Revolution #6)

"Grief," Rumi wrote, "can be the garden of compassion. If you keep your heart open through everything, your pain can become your greatest ally in your life's search for love and wisdom."

The Rebalancing course teaches some of the basic ways to relate to pain. Our unique perspective is that pain is a very active, creative expression of the body mind. We are not trying to fix it directly. We are interested in bringing awareness to the pain, and being present as awareness and pain interact with each other.

We do not advertise, promise, or convince other people that we cure pain.

Pain is an experience we all share.

It is a major reason why people come to us as practitioners; it is a major motivating factor in the way we live our lives.

Pain is intimately linked with our experience of pleasure, and with our ability to live. If we try to block pain, we will also block pleasure and in turn, lose a lot of our life force. This is one reason many people live at such low levels of vitality: avoiding pain of some kind or another will turn off our life forces. Also, there is a direct connection between our ability to be present with pain and our ability to stay connected with ourselves. Being intimate with ourselves often means learning to hang out with our various pains.

It can be a gift, often is, when we bring consciousness into it. When we don't, it will be hell. Said another way, pain is pain. Pain with unconsciousness and resistance is suffering. Often our work is to reduce the suffering element of pain.

Pain is often the completing element in a relationship that we didn't see, something like paying the bill at the restaurant. We all want the goodies, and then are shocked when the waiter comes with the bill. When we relate to others, or bodies, or ourselves unconsciously, then we are ordering pain. For example, if we use aggression, then we will create fear. If we separate from others, then we will experience pain in coming back to them. If we disconnect from our body, then pain will be part of our return to it.

The usual strategies we have with pain are the same things we learned to do as children.

- 1) We deny it.
- 2) We "leave the body."
- 3) We contract muscles to keep it down.
- 4) We collapse.
- 5) We get angry and fight.
- 6) We dissociate—I am separate from this.
- 7) We distract ourselves away from the pain.

8) We hide from it.

All of these strategies are based on the feeling of being helpless, and without any real resources for dealing creatively with the pain. We contract.

1) While there are many ways to eradicate pain for a short term, there are few ways to actually transform pain.

If we understand pain as an expression of some part of us that is not in balance, then we also realize that we need to do more than simply find tricks to turn pain off. To simply turn pain off, pharmaceuticals work just fine. To listen to what the pain may be expressing, and to invite it to transform into a positive, healthy state, we have to learn how to be present to it.

2) Pain involves at least two opposing forces. One force is for movement, another force is resisting this movement. One wants to change, the other doesn't. If there were no opposition, then there would be no pain. For example, when someone says, I want to change, they would. However, when they don't there must be some opposing forces. The hidden opposing forces cannot be wiped out, they must be recognized and integrated.

Most people come to the therapist asking for help with resolving the duality. Usually they ask the therapist to choose one side of the duality (most often the part that wants to change) and help it to be successful in its campaign against the other part. However, if the therapist chooses sides, the therapy will be very limited.

Resolving the conflict of the dualities usually means exposing and exploring both sides of the duality. In this exploration, we find that we are both, and also neither. This is where the true resolution comes from.

3) Generally we see pain as either acute (active) or chronic (dull). Acute pain hurts! It is hot, inflamed, positively charged, red in nature, and quite active. We have an excess of energy. Typically, the acute is more superficial, and often quicker to resolve when properly treated.

Chronic pain is cold, deep, and often empty in energy. It is longer in developing, and usually longer in going away as well. For chronic pain we use a different touch than with acute pain.

Often what we find are layers of pain, some acute, some chronic. The chronic will create an acute situation somewhere to call attention back to itself. The acute is where things are most ready for change, but usually not the source.

Usually the key to resolving chronic is to bring it back to an acute stage: in the body that might be fevers or inflammation, in the world of therapy that may be re-experiencing an old feeling or re-living an old situation.

4) The key to pain is within the pain. A good therapist knows how to open to the pain, and how to empower the client to be open to their own pain. There is a tremendous amount of energy tied up in pain. This energy can be hugely transformative if the pain is worked with creatively.

The essential quality for this is in the heart. An open, non-judgmental heart.

5) Atisha is an enlightened Tibetan master who left behind an exquisite heart meditation: Breathing into the heart, one absorbs the difficulty of another person, the way one breathes smoke away from a fire. Let the heart absorb this smoke, and breathe out love and light.

The heart has the natural capacity to transform without being injured itself. This is a resource you can always use, and always trust.

Compassion work begins with yourself. When you feel uncomfortable, open your mind and heart to the possibility, "If I am feeling this, then others must be also." This will radically shift your perspective on the suffering quality of the experience.

6) Osho: From Medication to Meditation, pg. 27:

"The religious attitude is to look, not for the symptom but for the source. That's what I call psychology of the Buddha's. If you have a headache, that is not your illness, that is not your disease. In fact, that is a signal from your body that something is going wrong in the source--- run to the source. Find out what is going wrong. The head is simply giving you a signal, a danger signal, an alarm: "Listen to the body. Something is going wrong, you are doing something which is not right, which is destroying the harmony of the body. Don't do it anymore; otherwise the headache will go on reminding you."

The headache is not the disease, and the headache is not your enemy—it is your friend. It is in your service. It is very very essential for your existence that the body should make you alert when something goes wrong. Rather than changing what is wrong, you simply put the alarm off—you take an Advil. This is absurd. This is what is happening in medicine and this is what is happening in psychotherapies—symptomatic treatment.

That is why the essential is missing. The essential is: look into the source....."

7) Perhaps the most powerful way of dealing with pain is to totally open to it. Don't hold back, just drink the whole cup down. This is amazing, especially with emotional pain.

When you wish to work with pain in this way, simply open your heart to the pain. Take it into your heart fully. Hold it in your heart as though it will be there for the next twenty years. Feel it, examine it from within the heart. Be present to it.

8) Perhaps the deepest pain we all experience is not physical, nor emotional. I would call it existential. It is the pain of separation. This is both separation from our connection with the "big something," and also separation from our true nature. Even if we live a "good" life, if we are not in tune with our unique nature, then there will always be a distinct sense of incompleteness, of an inner pain. Also if we live disconnected from the world around us, there will always be an attitude of frustration in whatever we do.

Often the physical and emotional pains will take us to a place of discovering these latter pains, and one of the best ways of transforming pain is using it to discover the attitudes of separation that we hold.

Physiology of Pain

1) The body has many resources for dealing creatively with pain. The biggest problems come when the short-term pain is not resolved and turns into a chronic condition.

2) Acute pain generates a shock response. The adrenals release adrenaline, the nerves filter out a lot of the painful impulses, the body becomes slightly rigid, and it shifts into an emergency mode.

In this phase, we often find a “frozen” quality, like that of an animal that stands in the headlights of a car, or is just about to be caught by a bigger animal. Something totally freezes up inside, and we lose our ability to respond and move away. In essence, we become numb and non-responsive.

3) Often this acute phase is handled, and we more or less go back into our original state. For the most part, however, there are residues of the shock left behind which can be found in the body for years after. These residues will generate an intense fear of being too alive, of reliving the shocking experience.

4) When the acute situation doesn't resolve soon, then the body shifts into chronic mode. In chronic we find several interesting mechanisms in action.

a) The body will seal off a painful area, isolate it and disconnect from it. This is done through lessening the blood supply, the nerve input, the energetic flows, and other means. This leads to further complications down the road later.

b) The body will refer the pain out. Often the stress and pain will travel to another part of the body which acts as a relief valve for the stressed part of the body. For example, liver stress can turn up as a headache, gall bladder stress can present itself as a sore hip. Pain in the eyes, teeth, ears, neck, and other places are often referred from somewhere else.

c) The body will also refer the pain out from the physical body into the emotions. Often a wound or hurt in the physical body will recall a myriad of unfinished emotional business. We get hurt and we become like little children again and feel the feelings of the child. We have a good cry or a good tantrum and we feel better again.

d) Compensation: if we have been hurt, then the body will shut down some of the functioning of the hurting place, and replace it with compensations from other parts of the body. If you have broken a leg, then the shoulders, hip, neck, torso, will all go into compensation patterns. Often these compensations lead to further problems, and often people will come for sessions because of the compensation patterns which have continued long after the pain was originally resolved.

This is true for physical pain, and especially true for emotional pains.

Techniques for Physical Pain

1) Assessment:

First try to understand what is going on. When a client comes with physical pain, always go big. Receive the pain in your heart, create a lot of space around it. Ask yourself, what is the bigger picture here. Usually we shrink in pain, and for sure the client will be shrunk. Open to the bigger field.

Touch the painful area. Palpate it and the surrounding tissues. Feel what happens. Is the tissue healthy? Is it warm or cold? Does it return to natural color easily? How much pressure does it take to get a pain response? How deep is the pain? In the superficial muscles, tendons, bones, connective tissue, nerves?

Ask:

Chronic or acute pain?

Medical condition?

Injury?

Illness?

Is this in the scope of my practice?

Second assess the awareness levels. Everyone shrinks in pain. Loses awareness, tries to escape. What are the awareness levels, how deep can we go, can we bring in awareness as an ally to the work?

What is the context that generates this pain? As Osho says, what is the source of it?

Structural

Energetic

Mis-use of the body

Bio-chemical

Referred system

Emotional pain that is condensed into physical form

Time for a change

Time for a new relationship with oneself/someone else

Observe, "How are we relating with the pain? How can we open this relationship so that there is a flow, a discharge of the overcharged pain areas, in other words, how can we receive what the pain has to offer?"

2) Heart meditation.

When someone is in acute physical pain, they are not interested in much else except relief. This is understandable. I usually give some form of pain relief before addressing the deeper problems. However, I make it clear that pain relief won't last very long without some other support.

The most important support we can give is helping clients learn to be present to their own experience.

For this I drop into my heart.

First I receive whatever my client brings. Just let it be, let it be heard, felt, recognized. The heart is not a fixer, a do-er. It is a transformer, and it transforms naturally by embracing

what is. If my heart can create an atmosphere where there is nothing wrong with what is, where there is nothing that needs to be different than what is, then my client will often fall in tune with that energy, and also feel the potential in non-doing. Give this plenty of space.

If a client is in a hot type of pain, I let my heart receive it in a green light. If they are in a cold pain, I receive it in a warm, orange light. Breathe in what is, breathe out the color and love.

Then I help a person to focus into their pain place---to look it directly in the eye. Feel it, explore it, describe it, and keep penetrating into it. For this, the focusing technique is enormously helpful. That technique is included later in these materials.

Through focusing we learn 1) not to be afraid of what's happening to us, 2) how powerful our own consciousness is in penetrating and transforming pain.

1) Questions and Touch.

When someone brings pain, ask him or her what color it is, and the intensity of the pain on a scale of 1-10. You can also ask the size of the pain, the shape of the pain, the texture of the pain.

Touch the painful area, be firm and bring the person to this area. Be firm enough to bring them totally into the painful place. When they arrive, the energy will soon shift. You will feel muscles releasing. When this happens, ask them for a new number for the pain level.

Keep repeating this technique as long as needed. Gradually increase pressure as the client allows it.

Continue until the pain drops to a #2 or lower.

This technique works 80% of the time, and is excellent for helping clients connect with themselves.

2) Support and Drainage:

Support the chronic pain areas so that they can relax into something that will carry them. Example of the shoulders and the lower back: you can relax the shoulders by strengthening the lower back.

Drain acute pain, which is an over energy state, by working distally, spreading the pain back out into the body where it can discharge.

Ground the pain by strengthening the connection with the legs, lower belly, solar plexus, and the earth.

Open the occiput and release mental cramping in the occiput and forehead areas.

3) Movement:

Create space around the pain for blood to circulate and energy to move through the area. If you can do this, then the area will heal itself unless it is seriously injured.

4) Breathing:

Begin breathing with the pain. Getting the breath right for the experience that is there. Breathing in will charge up an area (good for chronic) and breathing out will discharge an area (good for acute).

5) Meaning. Try to find the meaning, or sense of the pain condition. If we have an idea of what it is that is going on and that we can work with this creatively, then we can handle

1) almost anything. Finding meaning in our experience really helps us to face it. Don't force this, let it arise.

FOCUSING

1) How are you?

(Let whatever comes come.

Don't get too involved with what does come, just see and acknowledge each thing. A bit like taking inventory of what's on the shelf.

Make sure that you can step back from all the problems first, take a little space before you focus on any individual one issue.)

2) (Which feels the most active right now. Feel the sensation of this problem, get the felt sense of this problem in the body. The felt sense is the overall sensation you have, the feeling experience in the situation.

Try to feel all of it, the whole feeling of this "problem." Avoid thinking about it, or getting carried away into mind trips with it. Try to keep fleshing out the felt sense of it, moment to moment. That is, keep sensing how the experience actually feels on a moment to moment basis. As things change, say what the changes are. Hang in with the experiences and your words from these experiences until they match up.

Then, look again. How is it now?)

3) Stay with the feeling.

What is the most active part of it? Say what this is, how it is sensed in your body.

Wait and let words or images come out of this feeling.

4) Go back and forth between the words and the feeling, see how they match up, and see how the words change as the feeling changes.

Check back with the felt sense in the body. Is this right? Is this the real truth? Is this word accurate?

When the words and images match the feeling, stay there for a while. Feel how that feels. See if there isn't a relaxation and a new sense of energy in that place.

5) When stuck, ask questions like:

What is the worst of this feeling?

What is really so bad about this?

What does it need?

What should happen?

Don't give quick answers to the questions. Wait and see how the feeling responds.

Then, go back to the felt sense and see what it is saying now.

6) What would it feel like if it was all OK?

(Let this answer come from the body and felt sense.

See what may be in the way of that.)

With a felt sense, try to get a sense of the whole process that's going on. Not just, "I feel fear", rather a sense of a whole environment happening in my body in which fear is a large element.

Take the distance away from the problem, you have to get the sense of the whole complex that you feel in it. Stay with this sense of the whole for a while, then see what is the most troublesome part of that etc.

Emotional Pain

1) There is an intimate connection between chronic physical pain and chronic emotional pain. Often it is difficult to know where the story really starts, in the body or in the feelings. One thing you can know is that you will find stress in both. To resolve, support the body while working with the emotions.

2) Whatever presents itself, look for what is around it. The bigger context. We create situations that are painful in order to learn something. Try to feel for what the learning potential in any situation may be. Even if you can't pin this down, knowing that this is there deflates a lot of the victim energy we find in emotional pain.

3) In acute emotional pain, I don't do much. Listen from the heart, be present and understanding, and allow. Rest in the atmosphere that trusts the goodness of the situation exactly like it is. Give the client plenty of space to talk, discharge the emotion. Gently guide them back to feeling when they have gone off into thinking. Keep the experience in the present as much as possible.

4) In chronic emotional pain, I usually nudge the client to shift out of the victim position into the aggressor position. From there things can move.

5) The focusing technique is enormously helpful. Also the technique of dropping into the layer underneath....

6) Generally I work through the emotional pain with breathing. I also use my hands on the lower back, belly, and heart to support the let-go process.

In the breathing we will often go on a journey into the place of pain and resistance. As the journey builds intensity, it will call on us to make a new choice, different from the ones we made in the past. We will be called on to be totally vulnerable, or totally strong, or totally forgiving, whatever.....a new choice to be with the situation where we hardened before.

It is very intense just before this time, and it usually takes the therapist's presence to hold the space so that a new choice can be made.

When it does happen, the energy released and the attitude shift is phenomenal.

7) I usually recommend homework as a follow through for supporting the work we do with pain. This can be self-applied essential oils, diet, stretching, awareness exercises, journal writing, expressive exercises, and emotional re-patterning, and, especially, meditations like Kundalini and Dynamic. These are offered as ways to help people ground in the goodness of

their nature so that they (we) can face our pain and suffering in a new light and develop new understandings.